

December 20, 2002

Mr. Donald Tighe, Chief
Public Liaison Division
U.S. Agency for International Development
Bureau of Legislative and Public Affairs
1300 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Ste. 6.10-003
Washington, DC 20523

Dear Mr. Tighe:

I feel this request for an Operations Day's Work Grant of \$30,000 will be of particular interest to U.S.AID and to high school students in the U.S.

Bangladesh is a stable and democratic, but very poor, country. Its education is plagued with high dropouts, particularly at the high school level. The schools do not provide quality education.

The enclosed proposed project is directly related to education by tangibly improving the quality of education in four high schools. And, the project will directly benefit 240 scholarship holders from poor families, as well as all students in grades 9 and 10. VAB and Prakritajan (Bangladesh NGO partner) have had success improving schools and inspiring students with scholarships in similar schools. (Please see attachments.)

In addition to learning about Bangladesh, U.S. students may be able to send and receive e-mails directly from Bangladesh students. This will only be possible when the local Bangladesh phone system operates.

Questions regarding the proposal may be addressed to ATR Rahman, President, or to Peter von Christierson, VAB Project Director, who served in the Peace Corps in Bangladesh. A hard copy of application is being surface mailed to your office today.

Thank you very much for your time and your consideration.

Sincerely,

ATR Rahman, President
Volunteers Association for Bangladesh

Cc. Mr. S Saragi, USAID
Mr. Peter von Christierson
Professor A.B.M. Faroque

**OPERATION DAY'S WORK
2002-2003 FUNDING APPLICATION**

A. Project Information

Name of Project: **Capacity Building--- Youth, Schools, And Community**

Name of U.S. NGO: **Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB)**
Address: **122 Taxter Rd., Irvington, NY, USA, 10533**

Contact Person: **Dr. ATR Rahman, President, VAB**

Phone: **914-591-8635**

Fax: **914-591-7459**

E-mail Address: Araham10@aol.com

Project Sites in Country: **BANGLADESH**

1. RM High School, Raipura Upazila (similar to a U.S. county), Narsingdi District (similar to a U.S. state);
2. Zaman Nagar Girls' High School, Sapahar Upazila, Naogaon District;
3. Bitghar Radhanath High School, Nabinagar Upazila, Brahman Baria District;
4. Marichakandi DT Academy, Banchharampur Upazila, Brahman Baria District.

Collaborating Organizations: **Prakritajan, Bangladesh NGO**

Project Director: **Prof. ABM Faroque, Chairman, Prakritajan
Peter von Christierson, VAB Project Director
Principals of Each School, Locally In-Charge**

Project Start and End Dates: **July 1, 2003 – June 30, 2006 (3 years) Bangladesh school year is January to December. Project will be extended to Dec. 2006 if permissible. July to Dec. 2003 will be preparatory period.**

Amount Requested: **\$30,000**

B. Organizational Background

1. Organizational Background of VAB

Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB), a U.S. non-profit, is modernizing high school education and ensuring educational opportunities for very poor youth in rural villages of Bangladesh (population: 140 million), one of the poorest, densest and most rural countries in the world. VAB is providing books and equipment for libraries and

science laboratories and provides scholarships, books, fees, clothing allowances for students from large (6-7 member) poor families—typically day laborers or subsistence farmers—with average family incomes of \$17-35 per month (\$2 to \$4 per month per member). VAB also provides equipment and instructors for computer centers and a vocational school that train unemployed youth.

The VAB board is composed mostly of Bangladeshi high tech, medical and development professionals now living in the U.S. who have continuing interest and ties to Bangladesh. Several Americans serving on the board have international development experience and a special interest in Bangladesh. VAB is a U.S. 501(c)3 nonprofit organization founded in 1998 and registered with U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) as a Private Voluntary Organization since 2000.

2. Collaborative history between Bangladesh NGO and VAB

In 1998, VAB searched for a Bangladesh NGO with a vision similar to that of VAB and with solid experience in rural Bangladesh. Prakritajan is such an organization and has been the in-country operating entity for VAB ever since. Prakritajan, a Bengali word for “downtrodden people,” started in 1991 with a handful of professional men and women committed to the development of distressed people, particularly women. It now operates over 20 successful programs in 352 villages with a staff of over 1,000. Several programs organize landless peasants and destitute women for micro credit activities and adult education, and train street children in functional education and skill training. Prakritajan is registered with the Government of Bangladesh Department of Social Services and NGO Affairs Bureau.

3. Prior experience of VAB and Prakritajan

During the past four years, VAB has raised funds, provided technical assistance, monitoring and evaluation of the Prakritajan operated programs which include a high school scholarship program in 20 schools, seven computer training centers, a vocational school, upgraded libraries, laboratories, sports and cultural activities. Prakritajan has successfully secured on-going local funding and organized community committees to award scholarships and monitor programs in each of the 20 schools and computer centers. The scholarship program has provided tuition, fees, books, tutorial assistance and clothing allowance for 590 very low income students, currently 250 students per year. This year the computer centers have successfully trained 150 operators in 4-month courses. The majority of the operators are employed.

C. Project Description

1. Project Goal

The Bangladesh project will have as its goal modernizing four high schools to deliver a quality education, providing educational and skill training opportunities for 80 very low-income students each year enabling them to graduate, and training 160 unemployed youth in the third year to operate computers for employment. Without a graduation certificate or specific skill, students will have little chance to be other than a part-time agricultural laborer and be a burden to their family.

2. Project Objectives

- a. Prioritize four high schools to be modernized from the 20 schools already served by Prakritajan. Implement computer component in two schools at a time.
- b. Organize a Community Trust for each school, which will advise concerning the school modernization, oversee expenditures, and arrangements for library, tutoring and computer learning. It will also develop a fund for the continuation of the modernization after ODW funds are depleted and sponsor after-school and community events.
- c. Select 20 students from very low-income families from each school (total: 240 students) to receive scholarships, fees, books, tutoring as needed, and clothing allowance.
- d. Supply laboratory equipment and supplies for biology, chemistry and physics, textbooks, three computers and library books for each school.
- e. Provide one-day workshops for:
 - 1) school officials including principals and school board members from all schools, once each year, to discuss implementation, evaluation, and planning for next year.
 - 2) school officials and teachers at each school, once during project, to discuss school leadership, teaching strategies and effective school management to be led by two principals of recognized best schools in country.
 - 3) teachers from all schools teaching the same subject to discuss effective teaching methods twice a year. Subjects to be covered are math, sciences, English, computer, social sciences and library.
- f. For each school, arrange for after-school tutoring by teachers and local volunteer professionals to prepare grade 10 students for national exam.
- g. In 2nd year, begin computer education for grade 9 and 10 students and after-school computer training for 40 unemployed youth per school by qualified computer instructors.
- h. Conduct public awards ceremonies for teachers and students, and after-school sports and literary activities in the community to encourage and motivate students and teachers.
- i. Establish an evaluation program to provide a basis for replicating the project elsewhere.

3. Project Background/Rationale

The education level in Bangladesh is very low, 58% of the population above age 15 is illiterate whereas in South East Asia only 44% is illiterate. There are many reasons for this. Two reasons are that poor parents do not see the value of education and cannot afford (fees, books, uniforms) to send their children to school. Whereas the median grade completed by 15-19 year olds from the richest 20 percent of families is grade 8, those from the poorest 40% of families is less than grade 1. This project will provide scholarships for very low-income students. And, it will modernize the schools with books, science equipment and computers and additional training for teachers thereby improving the quality of education and making the education more valuable. In addition,

through the competitive scholarships, the community trust involvement in the school, the annual awards, and the sponsorship of sports and literacy events, the community will come to have more ownership in the school and value its education.

Bangladesh currently is a stable democratic country with few disruptive external influences. However, unemployed and marginalized youth are ripe targets for such external influences. This project will reduce the threat, contribute to Bangladesh development and strengthen its democracy.

D. Project Beneficiaries

1. Who will benefit from this project? and 2. How will they benefit?

The direct beneficiaries are the 20 low-income students every year from each of the four rural schools (total 240 students) that are selected to receive scholarships without which they would not be able to stay in school and therefore be marginalized by the society for the rest of their lives. For the scholarship students, the average household income is between \$17 and \$35 per month. Median family size is between 6 and 7 members. Thus each family member has to get by on about \$2 to \$4 per month. 63% of these poor families earn their livelihood from agriculture, either subsistence farming or day labor. The scholarship students will be 67% male and 33% female; the government provides scholarships for many female students.

An estimated 40 unemployed youth at each school will take the computer training after school hours in 2nd and 3rd years. Students from grade 6 to 10—630 students per school--will benefit from modernized schools. Forty percent of these students are female. Probably more than 50% of the students will be using the libraries on an on-going basis. Students in grades 9 and 10--a total of 240 per school, will benefit from the science labs. From past experience it is estimated that 24 students per school will take advantage of the tutoring program enabling them to pass national graduation exams.

Science and computer teachers and the librarians will benefit from having the equipment and computers they need to function. All of these professionals will also participate in training, seminars and other programs to update their skills. Parents will benefit from seeing their children graduate, some going on to higher education and others becoming employed. Most low-income parents rely on their children to support them as they age. And the community will benefit from being more involved in their school, valuing education more highly, encouraging more students to continue their education and having a more literate society.

3. How will the beneficiaries be involved in the planning and implementation of the project?

The second project objective is to organize a Community Trust in each community. The Trust will have open meetings and will advise on all key project components including modernization activities, oversee expenditures, arrange facilities for tutoring and computer learning. It will develop a fund for the continuation the modernization and help plan sports and literary events in the community. Community involvement in project planning is a new idea in Bangladesh. The Trust will be formed from representatives of

relevant education-centered groups in the particular community with officials of VAB and Prakritajan acting as advisors. Prakritajan has involved the community successfully in the past for the selection and monitoring of scholarship awardees through local committees. For this project, students will be added to the Trust. Much of the work of the Trust will be accomplished through subcommittees such as literary events, library, science, awards for teachers and students, computer training, and sports. Students will be asked to participate in all subcommittees.

4. How will the project promote the desirable youth outcomes—Confidence, Character, Connection, and Competence?

In the Bangladeshi society, a person not graduating from high school (i.e., passing a national test) is marginalized economically. The competition for jobs is fierce. Those that graduate and have computer skills can compete; those that don't, cannot compete. This project will build confidence and competence by assisting students to graduate from a modernized school. The connection comes about from connecting the school and the community. As the community participates in the Trust, volunteering, and organizing community events and viewing the school and education as valuable and owned by the community there is connection. Students will enhance this connection by participating in the Trust, public awards ceremonies, literary and sports events. A good education supported by active involvement of the Trust and students' participation in literary and sports activities will go a long way in forming discipline and character in students.

E. Project Implementation

1. What specific activities will you carry out to accomplish the project objectives?

- a. Prioritize four high schools and implement modernization project
- b. Organize a Community Trust for each school to select scholarship holders and oversee project.
- c. Select and award scholarships to 20 low-income students per school per year.
- d. Supply laboratory equipment/supplies, textbooks, computers, library books to schools.
- e. Provide workshops for:
 - 1) school officials from 4 schools to plan, once per year. (X)
 - 2) school officials and teachers at each school, once per school, to discuss leadership(XX).
 - 3) teachers teaching same subject from all schools, twice yearly, to discuss effective teaching methods(XXX).
- f. Arrange for after-school tutoring by teachers and local professional volunteers.
- g. Begin computer education for grade 9 and 10 students and after-school computer training for 40 unemployed youth per school by qualified computer instructors.
- g. Conduct community events—achievement awards for teachers and students, literary, sports.
- h. Establish an evaluation program to provide a basis for replicating project among 16 schools.

Timeline : 1, 2, 3, 4 represent schools / program-wide activity; (X) represent type of workshop

	Activity	Prep.2003	2004	2005	2006
a.	Prioritize schools-1, 2,3, 4	1,2,3,4			
b.	Organize Trust	1	2,3,4		
c.	Award scholarships	1,2,3,4,	1,2,3,4	1,2,3,4	1,2,3,4
d.	Supply books, equipment		1,2,3,4	1,2,3,4	1,2,3,4
e.	Provide workshops/TA	(X)	(XX)	(X) (X X X)	(X) (X X X)
f.	Begin tutoring		1,2,3,4	1,2,3,4	1,2,3,4
g.	Begin computer instruction			1,2	1,2,3,4
h.	Conduct events		1,2,3,4	1,2,3,4	1,2,3,4
i.	Evaluate	1,2,3,4	1,2,3,4	1,2,3,4	1,2,3,4

2. How will each side of the partnership will be involved in the implementation?

The Prakritajan professional and administrative staff in cooperation with VAB Country Representative and its Advisory Board is responsible for project implementation. Prakritajan in consultation with VAB country officials will prioritize the first schools to implement the project from their prior knowledge of each school and its community. Prakritajan field staff will organize and oversee the Community Trust. The Trust and its committees, composed of school board, Head Masters, teachers when appropriate, representatives of Prakritajan and education related groups and students, award scholarships and set project policy, assist with securing in-kind contributions and volunteers and supporting community events. Prakritajan headquarters staff will house the Project Director and project bookkeeping. It will supply equipment and books, will arrange training and technical assistance to teachers and will implement an evaluation program. Head Masters of each school will be local Project Coordinator. VAB officials in the U.S. and its Country Representative and Advisory Board will supervise the project, continue to raise funds, provide technical assistance and be involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the project.

3. What other local individuals, organizations and/or agencies will be involved in project?

The four local school boards will be heavily involved in the project. Officials of local government and local voluntary groups will be invited to participate in the project. Coordination will be essential with the Bangladesh Government, Ministry of Education so that all government policies are followed and support for the school is maintained. The Bangladesh NGO Affairs Bureau will approve and monitor the project to see that all components are implemented.

4. What are your plans for continuing the project after ODW funds are spent?

The efforts of Prakritajan and the local community trust will ensure that the momentum of a modern school will continue. VAB will continue to provide scholarship funds for the project and will pick up small expenses not covered by the trust to maintain equipment, provide incentives to teachers and support the literary and sport events.

F. Project Evaluation

1. What results do you anticipate from this project?

- a. Increase in student participation and interest in better education and skill development.
- b. Increase in student and unemployed youth capability.
- c. Increase identification of community with school and quality education.
- d. Increase ability of teachers and school to impart knowledge.

2. What information will you collect and how?

All information, including baseline information from 2003, will be collected by school and monitored by the community trust and Prakritajan. The information to be collected will include:

- a. Percent of student dropouts in grades 7, 8, 9 and 10,
- b. Percent of grade 9 and 10 students complete science sections,
- c. Percent of students using library,
- d. Number of grade 9 and 10 students and unemployed youth completing computer course,
- e. Percent of 10th grade students ranking A, B or C on national exam.
- f. Number of public events sponsored by school—literary events, award ceremonies, sports.
- g. Amount of local funds and in-kind contributions contributed by community.

Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB) ODW proposal--Attachment

Bangladesh – Country Information

Bangladesh has a democratic form of government, is relatively stable and has an economy that is growing. However, the majority of the population is desperately poor. Bangladesh is physically the size of Wisconsin but with a population of 132 million whereas Wisconsin has 5 million. The population density of this country is 2,500 persons per square mile, which is higher than many U.S. cities. (The density for New York State, including New York City, is 218 persons per square mile). But Bangladesh is predominately rural with only three large cities. Most households are large, 4-8 persons of all ages. 50% of the population is 19 years of age or younger. If the household is lucky, it owns the land their house (bamboo walls and thatch roof) sits on--no yard, if they are doubly lucky, they also own a small plot for a family subsistence garden. Electricity and clean water for drinking are rare. Jobs, even part-time ones, are very difficult to find. During the monsoon season over a ¼ of this densely populated land may

be flooded. Two stories about students who have received scholarships from VAB-Prakritajan highlight the situation.

Md. Masud Rana is a ninth grade student in Mohjidpara High School. He ranks 9th in his class and is an excellent, eager student. However, for Masud day-to-day existence has been a constant struggle and has impacted his ability to focus on his studies. Masud was born into poverty. His father left home when Masud was an infant. After his mother remarried and went to live with her new husband, Masud was left in the care of his uncle's family. Today, Masud contributes to his family's subsistence by working as a day laborer. Because of his enthusiasm to learn, his school's principal, Mr. Md. Sajedul Alam, has taken Masud under his wing and has helped him through the courses that Masud has had to miss. Masud's scholarship from VAB-Prakritajan has enabled him to purchase a complete set of books, writing materials and even a new uniform, all of which are luxuries for this keen student. When asked how he felt about his scholarship and achievements, Masud was unable to speak because he was in tears.

Md. Hannan's family is similarly poor. His father is a landless day laborer with four sons and three daughters. Hannan is expected to help his father in the fields, since without his help, his family would struggle to put food on the table. However, with his mother's encouragement and support, Hannan has convinced his father to let him work in the fields after school and during holidays so that he can continue his education. With the help of his VAB-Prakritajan scholarship Hannan has achieved the ranking of fourth in his class. He is currently attending ninth grade of Mohjidpara High School, Sapahar, Naogaon.

These stories are typical of all holders of scholarships. They illustrate that in spite of the problems they face and that with a small amount of help, very poor students are committed and can excel.

Bangladesh -- System of Schools

The Bangladesh system of schools is overwhelmed by the growing population and by the young age of the population; over 50% of the population is 19 years old or younger. 90% of the schools are private. The government has supported the building of many secondary (high) schools, but by far the majority of schools were built with funds from the local community. A portion of each high school teacher's salary (total salary is \$654 per year) is paid by the government; the remainder of the salary is paid from tuition fees collected from the students. The government cannot fund more of the education because it has very little money.

The quality of schools must be improved. Chemistry and physics laboratories have no equipment and supplies, which is very frustrating for both teachers and students. The libraries have almost no books.

The statistics are depressing. 59% of the population is illiterate. Almost 80% of 15-19 year olds have completed grade 1, yet less than 20% have completed grade 9. When income is added to the equation the picture is grim. For 15-19 year olds in the poorest

40% of households, only 9% complete grade 9. After grade 10, students must qualify in their own schools and then take a national exam. Last year, 786,220 students appeared at the exam. Only 35.22% passed.

In 2002, 44 VAB-Prakritajan scholarship holders from very poor families appeared for the exam. 42 of the scholarship holders passed for a pass rate of 94%. Out of the 42 passing, 16 or 32% received “A”. The national average receiving “A” is less than 1%. 23 received “B” and 2 received “C” and 1 received “D”. Again, it shows that the VAB-Prakritajan method works, with a little help the students from poor families can achieve amazing results.